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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 000307

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DS/DSS/ITA, DS/IP/AF, DS/DSS/CC, AF/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2013

TAGS: ASEC NI PINS

SUBJECT: LAGOS EXPLOSION AND NNPC FIRE FOLLOW-UP

Classified By: RSO J. Pelphrey. Reason 1.5 (d) and (g)

¶1. (C) Summary: RSO met with police officials on Thursday and Friday 02/06 and 02/07 regarding last Sunday's explosion in Lagos. Police provided some insight into the explosion. RSO staff has also been in contact with the bomb squad in an effort to see explosives taken from the scene. One police contact provided additional thoughts on the fire at NNPC. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On Thursday 02/06/03, RSO met with Assistant Commissioner Ojiri (please protect) concerning police support for the Consulate in the event of hostilities and to request information regarding the explosion on Sunday 02/02/03. AC Ojiri confirmed that the area of the explosion is a market area where Lagos merchants go to buy wholesale merchandise for resale throughout Lagos. He said he did not believe the explosion was terrorist related and cited the death of a local Imam as proof. The explosion could have been politically motivated citing the upcoming elections. The most likely cause of the explosions was the storage of the explosives by someone needing money and having a storage space for rent. Unfortunately, the bomb squad was unable to identify the origin of the explosives. When RSO offered that the USG was standing by to offer assistance if requested, AC Ojiri said that the Nigerian Police were not yet ready to request assistance, but he would pass on the offer on Friday when he met with the Lagos State Commissioner of Police. When asked if the house where the explosion took place might be a bomb factory, AC Ojiri initially did not understand the question stating the place of the explosion was not the target. When asked again, AC Ojiri suggested the possibility that the owner of the explosives asked someone to arrange storage for a fee and the explosives were stored in a warehouse area of the residence.

¶3. (C) On Friday 02/07/03, RSO met with Superintendent Garba Baba-Umar (please protect) head of Ikoyi Island police district. During the conversation, Superintendent Baba-Umar described the explosives as two types. One type was long and rectangular about the size of a desktop stapler and the second was round like an apple but bigger than a hand grenade. The Superintendent advised that members of the bomb squad had never seen these types of explosives. The Superintendent offered the following description of events of the explosion: There was a small explosion that started a fire followed by two larger explosions that brought down the houses. The superintendent did not offer how the first explosion was caused. The Superintendent said he suggested a sweep of the neighborhood to locate additional caches of explosives to his superiors, but his idea was not enthusiastically received. He advised that he believes the investigation is going slowly because Lagos State politics was behind the explosions. He cited the confiscation of numerous weapons by numerous agencies in the past several months as further evidence of Lagos State political involvement in recent problems. He also advised that numerous "area boys" who have been involved in a gang war have been charged to court for criminal activities only to be released on bail at the urging of political leaders and their lawyers.

¶4. (C) Superintendent Baba Umar (please protect) provided the following information regarding the NNPC fire. He said that he has a tape recording of the suspect from the NNPC fire in which the suspect admits starting the fire. The Superintendent advised that he did not believe the suspect participated in the fire. The Superintendent advised the only troubling part of the confession was the suspect's reference that Kaduna would be next. The Superintendent advised that the NNPC refinery in Kaduna caught fire the day following the fire at NNPC headquarters in Lagos. The Superintendent said he believed the NNPC fires were politically motivated.

¶5. (C) RSO FSNI has spoken to the bomb squad deputy

commander several times during the week who has confirmed the explosives are commercial explosives. RSO has requested to see the explosives with the intention of photographing them. The Commander of the bomb squad was in Abuja on Friday and the request will be made again on Monday. The investigation into the cause of the explosion continues. RSO will provide additional information as it becomes available.

HINSON-JONES